

Meredith Quartermain / TWO POEMS

Cochineal

A small fiery dome of black spots
crawls in my lamplight —
with tiny articulations
of edges of paper and
smooth blue plastic of pen.

Now and again she stretches her wings.

She holds paper surface
ridged with the fibres of trees
in her hands, or, if you like, her non-hands —
what we give insects for hands.

She comes to rest again
in a valley between two red hills,
facing away from the green felt
scalloped around a pinhead
of Remembrance Day poppy.
So jaunty on its straight-pin stalk —
its scarlet plastic is fuzzed
and puffed to undulate
like petals.

Under her fiery dotted back
she has tucked her legs,
or, if you like, her appendages,
that hold on to the rough poppy redness.

The whitish patches we might see as eyes
face the gray light from the window.

It is November. Would she like to go now
from my warm, dry desk to wet leaves and frost?
Will my book explain the desires of insects?
It does not list ladybugs.
Should I look in my index
under insects?

Ladybird beetle, they call her,
from the family Coccinellidae.
A dash of colour across my tongue —
a hummingbird from Emily Dickinson.

And when eyes are hummingbirds
who'll tie them,
with a lead string, Williams asked.

And when words
are humming
birds
who'll set them free?

"Ladybird, ladybird
fly away home, your house is on fire,
your children all gone."

Flash of wing-light zips from the scarlet poppy.
Gone? To my blue wall?

the bright quilt? the lamp? Ah — the black
plastic of telephone
passage to midnight sky
to the space in darkness.
She walks along, then headfirst down a vertical side,
then upside down the underside
to a keyhole
the telephone could hang on a screw-head.

On the tops of mountains in late summer,
the book says,
Ladybird beetles gather on rocks,
then crawl beneath
with friendly red bodies
for their winter sleep.

Can I call her this —
tell her this —
inside my telephone?

For Someone in Heart Surgery

walk along seawall
the edge of this
white frost encrusted sand
the shimmer the mirror of sea
the line of glass distance to sky
freighters rusted hulls stilled
a vast singing organ of day
of sunshine of bright logs
on the beach, of bright dogs
fetching sticks or a man's walk
on top of rock wall above waves
shading his eyes, water glimmers
his cheeks, forehead, lapping
sea at shore, the shore of this
gathering
flock of buffle-heads huddle
in shallows, diving, bobbing
up, shaking wings with squirps
and squinges, woman towed
by flock of terrier sniff at
grass and earth, an artist's
yellow loop encircling sky
sea, trees pull into this
skinhead youth burly sunbaked
between log and boulder
skateboard, wheels up,

on outstretched legs
shoulder tight to his mate
with dirty ball-cap on matted hair
jeans grubbed, torn, running shoes
worn through, a gnarled hand
holding a cup made of plastic,
whole crew of men jogging
office out for lunch of lycra legs
striped trainers, white socks
shirts black and red black
and blue, black and yellow
thudded bodies pound
past mother speaking French
to toddler ambling behind stroller
red cheeks, eyes blue as the sea
pull
pull into this
three white dots on black
feathers of ducktail
pull into this day.